How One Bad Apple Can Spoil the Whole Brand
(a spotlight on company culture)

We thought it would be a fun exercise to analyze a few different companies and see what we could glean about their culture based on nothing more than what we could find online.

Company reviews on job boards, customer reviews, and company Facebook pages can tell us a lot about customer and employee perception, which can have an enormous impact on your brand.

This exercise does not include content from individual social accounts or private groups, only publicly available review sites such as Glassdoor and Yelp as well as the company website and their Facebook page(s).

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Their Talk - How They Describe Themselves

- Mission focused, values driven culture.

- Caring, customer-centric, service oriented.

- Positive and compassionate employees.

How Others Describe Them

Employee reviews were limited and outdated, with the most recent of the three being over two years old. Of those three reviews, two were positive, one was negative. All three reviews pointed to substandard benefits packages.

Over 50 customer reviews were found, and at least 60% of them were negative. A majority of those negative reviews were directed towards the same one of the three locations. The two other locations had limited reviews, but of those, all were positive and/or received the maximum of 5 stars.

The positive reviews, which included all three locations, indicated gratitude and appreciation for the customer's experience:

> "As someone who's always hated going to the doctor, both experiences I've had here have been tremendous! All of the staff is genuine, friendly, and knowledgeable!"

> "I felt everyone was truly concerned about helping me resolve my current health issue. Thank you."

> "Great place, always very nice staff, and work my family in if needed. Also a great place to work."

> "We have been given excellent care."

> "Fixed my life and fear of doctors. It feels good to finally be getting the help I've needed for so long."

According to Forbes:

Values are the foundational guidelines behind both brand and organizational culture. They unite the two.

For some, the positive experience was directed towards the primary care giver:

"Genuine and understanding and went out of her way to research the problems I was having to help me with them."

"A brilliant diagnostician, and someone I would recommend to anyone who wants to work with a medical professional who maintains current knowledge, is a true scientist, and able to provide sound recommendations and appropriate treatment... very dedicated to helping me maintain the best possible health."

"Very professional yet friendly and funny...has only ever been kind, professional and wonderful to me!"

"I can't say enough great things about him. We now live three hours away and I travel back to see him. One in a million!"

Those who did not have a positive experience, were clearly upset about the quality of care they received:

An Inc. article recently noted:

It takes over 40 positive reviews to offset one negative review.

"If I could give this place 0 stars I would. I highly recommend going somewhere else. I've been going here since I was younger and it honestly just has taken a plunge for the worst. Both the physician and the medical assistant didn't give me the time of day. It seemed like they were just at another work day and wanted to get out of there. I'll just save you the time and say go somewhere else. The last couple experiences I have had there personally just have been terrible and seem to just keep getting worse as it prolongs."

"My experience with the physicians has been pretty good. My experience with the business office had been nothing but demeaning and unreasonable...If you can go somewhere else, I'd recommend it."

"This is not a good place to go if you are in need of consistent and quality care. Most physicians will make you feel like a nuisance for even showing up. If you have no other choice than a place like this, then the best advice I can give is to be prepared to be an advocate for yourself."

"If only zero stars were available... Wow a prime example of all that is wrong in American Health Care. Never again."

"I assumed the staff and doctors would be friendly, and willing to help. I was horribly wrong....The staff treated me poorly and with no bedside manner. I will never be going here for anything again."

"Their billing department is rude, and insensitive. Drive an extra 15 minutes and go to [their competitor]."

"VERY unprofessional and poorly organized staff...they do not take time to listen to the patient and it seems like they just want to get rid of you. If I had a heart attack in their parking lot, I'd ask to be transferred to [competitor]... or ANYWHERE else!"

"TERRIBLE! Was denied medical treatment with [insurance provider] and am 21 weeks pregnant!!!! Unbelievable!!! Horrible customer service!"

"STAY AWAY!!!!!!!!!!!!"

Some of these reviewers called out the primary care provider as the reason for their negative experience.

"Until this place gets rid of Dr. [name omitted] they deserve poor reviews. Misdiagnosed my child, bullied me out of a test I requested which resulted in me later needing surgery, and I have met a few people with similar stories."

"Just don't go here. Dr. [name omitted] is the most unprofessional doctor I have encountered."

"Disorganized, slow, and borderline antagonistic. Please, save yourself and your loved ones some time and literal pain, and seek out a specialist directly. Dr. [name omitted], specifically, seems to lack a fundamental humanity in the way he thinks about his patients. You will be just a number here, and it will feel dehumanizing. You have been warned."

Our Takeaway

Negative reviews happen, but those found for this company were consistent over the span of many years.

In the case of this organization, there weren't enough positive reviews to offset the highly visible and easy to find scathing reviews. Negative reviews matter. They can cause four out of five consumers to change their choice about purchasing or using a service. They can also turn-off prospective employees, making it more difficult to recruit already difficult to fill positions in a tight labor market.

Addressing the negative reviews with authentic, genuine interest, and an invitation to connect with the customer to work through the issue would have been more helpful than the random template responses used in the past. This approach makes the company appear uncaring and ambivalent to the customers concerns.

Even if the negative reviews were left by a minority, since so many suggested going elsewhere for services, prospective customers (as well as potential employees) could be influenced into considering other alternatives. "When businesses respond to unhappy customers (and actually resolve the problem) that customer is 70 percent more likely to use the business again."

What Do Customer Reviews Have To Do With Workplace Culture?

In the career section of the company website, culture is stated first and foremost, with values such as professionalism, respect and accountability specifically stated amongst others. Trust, compassion and service is also mentioned as a part of the company mission. These values create the expectation that they will show up in how customers are treated and services are provided.

The negative customer reviews and how they've been handled, highlight disconnects and a potentially misaligned culture, especially for the location that was most frequently mentioned in those reviews.

How much are online reviews worth?

97 percent of consumers read online reviews, and they trust these reviews as if they were from friends and family.

The other locations did not appear to receive such reviews, which suggests misalignment is primarily at one location; however, when inconsistencies like this occur, it can often show up as one or more isolated incidents. In time, however, when left unaddressed, it can spread to other parts of the company.

In addition, a potential misalignment between corporate leadership and leadership at the location level likely exists. And since the one location has encountered negative reviews - by emotionally upset customers - over the span of multiple years to the present day, it is safe to assume this misalignment has been allowed to persist.

Suggestions For Improvement

- Revisit the company values and mission to determine if they remain relevant for the company. If they do, then clarify the definition of each value including what it looks like when it shows up in practice, as well as when it is missing. It is also important to incorporate those values in all aspects of the work environment, including hiring practices, performance expectations and metrics, customer service protocols, and accountability and rewards programs, to ensure they are being modeled, practiced and enforced company-wide.

- Set up a process of consistently reviewing and responding to customer reviews, both compliments and complaints, to ensure every voice feels heard (assuming this is something that aligns with the company values). This will communicate to prospective customers and employees that the company is attentive to customers, walks their talk, and is interested in learning and improving.

- Glassdoor is a powerful forum for past and current employees to voice their perspectives, and for prospective employees to research potential employers. The Glassdoor reviews for this company were over two years old, and there were only three in total, with one being quite negative. It might be helpful to encourage current employees write reviews and for the company to become more active on that site. Doing so can be a valuable learning opportunity for the company to better understand and address employee sentiment and more closely align their culture. An absence of reviews suggests employees are indifferent about their employer.

If a prospective employee attempts to research the company and finds little current information about them on Glassdoor, they will look elsewhere. In a quick search outside of Glassdoor, the first things that show up are reviews, with the most negative appearing first.

FastCompany and GrantThornton reported:

75% of executives say their organization has defined values that are communicated and understood, but only 33% of employees agree.

Company activity on Glassdoor shows that they are interested in their reputation as an attractive employer, which can be helpful even if the reviews aren't all positive. Most people recognize that people leaving reviews do so when upset, and that sometimes those are isolated incidents - especially when there are positive reviews mixed in with them. But no reviews, and no activity, allows the prospective employee to create their own impression based on very limited and sometimes outdated information. For purposes of this company, since the easiest reviews to find tend towards the negative, more information is preferable to less.

When customer reviews highlight inadequacies with processes, the potential for improvement points to clarifying roles and responsibilities, and to do so from the perspective of both the customer and employee experience.

When customer reviews negatively call out specific people, especially more than once, opportunity for improvement points towards individual coaching and ensuring all employees align with the company's values and culture. If they don't, then action is highly recommended to ensure anyone misaligned with the culture and values either commits to adopting them or ends their employment with the company.

And when customer reviews are highly emotional and collectively point towards one location, the potential for improvement points to aligning leadership, not only within that location, but across the board. Because ultimately it is the CEOs responsibility to establish, model and ensure the alignment of the workplace culture company-wide, or risk one bad apple spoiling the entire brand reputation and value.

*Go beyond HR and find out what it takes to create the culture you want. To learn more send us an **email** or give us a call at **952 496 1444** — we'd love to chat!*

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